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### Why So Few Believed in The 'Hit Squad'

Senate Majority Leader Howard Baker announced weeks ago that the threat to President Reagan and other high officials from Libyan assassination squads was "diminishing." What was diminishing was the credibility of the reported threat.

The charges that led to the international uproar—and the tightened security measures at U.S. border crossings — were contained in a 40-page secret report by the Central Intelligence Agency to the National Security Council. My associate Ron McRae has seen parts of this report.

From the outset, foreign policy experts outside the spy agency assessed the CIA's assassination alarm as "possible, but not much better than 10 percent." But obviously, however farfetched the possibility, it had to be treated seriously by security agencies.

"The Secret Service tracks down dozens of crank calls every year, including threats to shoot Reagan with psychic bullets," one official pointed out, adding: "But we don't broadcast them all over the world."

What made non-CIA people in the administration suspicious of the

Libyan hit squad story is clear from the CIA report itself:

- The chief source of the hit squad allegation, who claimed to have been present when Libyan dictator Muammar Qaddafi gave orders for the assassins' mission, demanded \$500,000 for his information (whether he received it is unknown). The fact that the informer passed a lie-detector test is not compelling; a practical liar can beat the gadget, particularly someone with the coolness to demand a half-million for his story.

- The informer also provided the names of some buddies in Beirut who would be willing to sell information on the drug traffic. The CIA recognized some of them as hustlers who had been peddling phony documents for years. Oddly enough, though the CIA itself was dubious about this part of the informer's material, the Drug Enforcement Administration began stuffing suitcases full of cash in anticipation of a big score in Beirut.

- Two of the 14 names on the hit squad were members of the Lebanese Shiite Moslem sect, Amal, which has been engaged in a blood feud with Qaddafi since their leader, Mousa Sadr, disappeared in Libya in 1978. The FBI claimed that the names were included because of a "computer error" and were quickly removed. Yet the names were still on the list in documents issued at least 12 days later.

- Several of the informers are known to have connections with Israeli intelligence, which would have its own reasons to encourage a U.S.-Libyan rift.

- The report calls the evidence of the hit squad's existence "overwhelming," and predicts that "more detailed information is forthcoming" from reliable sources. None materialized.

- The CIA report predicted confidently that its evidence "guarantees the support of allied governments in any action deemed reasonably necessary to protect the lives of American officials." In fact, our allies, when briefed on the CIA findings, found them unconvincing—in a class with the white paper on El Salvador earlier last year, which was later shown to have relied on highly questionable and probably forged documents.

Footnote: There is a possibility that the CIA was played for a sucker by its own "disinformation" campaign directed at Qaddafi. The campaign, ordered by CIA Director William J. Casey last May, used foreign nationals for the dirty work.

Knowing what the CIA wanted, and without proper supervision by American agents, it's possible the CIA's foreign hirelings cooked up the "hit squad" on their own. It fit neatly into the Reagan administration's political scheme of things, and—*voila!*—a full-blown international incident was born.